

THE CARTOONS.

The public has already been made acquainted, through the medium of contemporary publications, with the particular merits and imperfections of the Cartoons now exhibited in Westminster Hall. It is not, therefore, our intention to renew the discussion upon this subject, nor to canvass the correctness of the decisions which these journals have recorded. We are anxious rather to induce our readers to visit the exhibition themselves, and to exercise their own judgment and discrimination, instead of placing implicit confidence in the opinions of writers whose criticisms, unfortunately, are not always characterized by fair and impartial investigation, but whose writings too frequently bear strong evidence of a disposition to withhold commendation from the gifted artist, for the mere purpose of gratifying a private pique or a personal aversion; while, on the other hand, they elevate the merits of their friends into undue importance, and touch their many and glaring faults with tenderness.

It is our intention, therefore, to view this subject in a different light—to take these Cartoons as illustrative of the principles and feelings at present existing in the public mind. To effect which we cannot do better than analyze the nature of the subjects chosen by the artists for this exhibition. It will be remembered that the Royal Commission of Fine Arts required the artists to select their subjects from British History, or from the works of Spenser, Shakspeare, or Milton. Now how many artists have supplied themselves from these sources? Upon examining the catalogue, we shall find that from British History there are about 70 Cartoons, 16 of which are distinctly of an ecclesiastical nature; from the works of Spenser 9 subjects have been chosen, from Shakspeare 16, and from Milton 32. There are also about a dozen of an allegorical nature, and a few miscellaneous; but there are not more than six Cartoons which attempt to embody conceptions of a national or a philosophical character—which attempt to clothe in material forms the loftiest conceptions of genius, and thus tend to raise the country in which they are produced, to the highest pitch of renown.

Now, in viewing the Cartoons in this light, it may happen that the subjects which we point out as illustrating our position may not be works which display the greatest amount of artistic talent, but such a circumstance will not militate against our principles. The humblest artist may have had the loftiest conception of his subject, although he may not have been proportionately successful in the execution of it; and it is with the former only that we have to do on the present occasion. Among the Cartoons, then, which, in our opinion, embody conceptions of a national and philosophical character, we would instance "Edward I. addressing the First Deputies of Boroughs," "Alfred the Great submitting his Code of Laws for the approval of the Witan," "First Trial by Jury," "King John signing Magna Charta," "A Witch led to Execution," "The Fight for the Beacon." Such subjects as these are eminently fitted for exercising the talents of gifted artists. They form, too, so prominent a portion of our national history, they have to do with times which nerve men's hearts for heroic deeds and lofty actions. Stirring times were these which these artists have chosen, whether we view them with reference to the period when the people's representatives first formed a rough and important sketch of the future House of Commons, or to the time when the mighty Saxon arranged those laws which, though now lost, served long as the basis of English jurisprudence, and which are generally considered to have been the origin of what is now called the *Common Law*. Then there is the Trial by Jury, and the signing of the Great Charter; then again those periods when superstition stalked through the land, when men's minds, in their fearful and gloomy imaginings, peopled this beautiful earth of ours with scarcely other than demoniacal existences. There are others, too, which refer to those fierce and half-barbarian days when pirates and midnight marauders infested our coasts. These subjects, we repeat, have been well chosen, because they constitute a part of our national history, and of our parliamentary legislation, but how small a part do these form of the entire collection!

Place in contrast to this circumstance the

fact of there being nearly 20 Cartoons descriptive of battles, of the warfare of physical strife and of brute force. Such a circumstance cannot be spoken of but with deprecatory feelings; it is the old stigma on our national taste, it reminds us of those days of fierce conflict, when this ruling passion found a hearty response in the domestic circle, and eleven out of every twelve pictures in a room were battle-pieces. They were times when it seemed men delighted in nothing so much as to view heaps of slain and fields of carnage. These feelings, indeed, have not yet passed away, as is proved by the large proportion which those subjects bear in the present collection of Cartoons. They are, however, the necessary result of giving undue importance to military achievements and their consequences,—fire, bloodshed, and desolation,—rather than to the encouragement of the more humanizing principles of civilization,—the magnanimity of self-devotion, and the cultivation of the kindest feelings of our nature.

In passing through the list of these 140 Cartoons, we cannot but regret the absence of works of intellectual grasp and vigorous comprehension, such productions as were the pride and glory of Grecian art, and which still command the admiration of the world. There are devils and fiends in abundance, but only one Caractacus—a captive in the streets of Rome, with his soul soaring above his misfortunes. The eventful period of Charles the First's reign has produced only one Cartoon. There is a complete absence, too, of subjects connected with modern events, many and stirring as those events have been; there is a yielding to the common error that we must look to past times for heroic deeds and soul-stirring aspirations. Does the human heart, then, beat less proudly and less strongly now than in days of yore? Do we not find it now throbbing with towering ambition, and anon silently breaking under unmerited suffering? Do we not find it rising and falling as frequently now—increased in coat and waistcoat though it be—as ever it did in the so much vaunted times of the steel-clad age? Human character can never be placed in such circumstances that there is not some important truth to be told respecting it, some dignity to be discovered, or a lesson to be taught.

There is also much that is tamely beautiful and coldly correct among these Cartoons, a display of a smoothness of outline and a prettiness of treatment, with a due portion of silk and satin, and a crowding together of simple shepherds and shepherdesses, which betrays but a mediocre appreciation of the truly beautiful. Such a mode of treatment shows the subjugation of talent to the conventionalities of a profession, and often produces creatures which nature would not own as her legitimate offspring. It reminds one of Lucian, who to form the portrait of a perfect beauty recommends that she should have "the forehead and eyes of Praxiteles's Venus; the turn of the face, cheeks, and nose of Phidias's Lennian woman; the mouth and shoulders of his Amazon; the neck and fine hand of the Venus of Alcmena; the smile, modest appearance, and drapery of the Venus's Sosandrian; the youthful air of the Calamis's Coidus; the hair of Euphranor's Juno; the beautiful colours and paces of the Cassandra of Polygnotus; the delicate tints of the Paeata of Apelles; and the lips of Acton's Roxana." This mode of "embellishing" nature will not do, no student will follow his advice, for it would produce a monster rather than a beauty.

Art is seriously abused when made to subserve such caprices as these; neither should it be used to delineate unfortunate creatures in the agonies of a violent death, or expiring under the poisonous breath of pestilence. The Greeks, it is true, were familiarized to the effusion of blood and to spectacles of death, but a mind of sensibility must lament over the most successful production of an artist who could form his idea from the dying gladiator, paint from a man involved in grief and distress, or describe a situation like that of the unfortunate Lucretia and his children devoured by frightful serpents. It was not such scenes as these that immortalized Grecian art, and though they may excite admiration in some minds, they must ever occasion pain to the humanized and tender-hearted. God knows we behold enough misery, wretchedness, and privation around us to excite our commiseration, without the artist labouring to perpetuate recollections at which the heart sickens. Let

us not, however, be mistaken; we do not sympathize with those whose feelings are so exquisitely refined that they must have every thing removed from their eyes and ears which may excite unpleasant emotions; such persons as they who cannot encounter a case of suffering because it may perchance disturb the placidness of their countenance. What we contend for is, that the constant delineation of these subjects does not tend to increase our sympathy for suffering humanity, or stimulate our exertions for ameliorating the condition of our fellow-creatures. There are deeds of heroism and of self-devotion in the field of battle, which are as fitting subjects for the pencil as the pen, but such subjects are seldom chosen,—the present exhibition, to wit; the painter too frequently delineates only the horrors of the scene, without leaving an object worthy for the mind to rest on.

One word more before we close these observations; although there is in this collection much that is bad, exceedingly bad, both in the choice of the subject and in the style of execution, yet, viewing the whole as a reflection of the public mind, and as a fair embodiment of the public taste and feeling, we see in it much that is worthy of commendation, much which proves to us that there is a gradual cultivation of a healthier moral sense in the community. There is another circumstance, too, which we cannot pass unnoticed, namely, an increasing desire on the part of the public to be admitted free of charge to all the national depositories of art and science. Our own opinion is that such a measure would be attended with the best results; we shall therefore always advocate the free and unreserved admission of the public to them, without money and without price. The working classes have proved by their conduct that the opprobrium cast upon them was extremely unmerited and unjust; they have shown that they can visit the soul-stirring realization of the poet's fancy without leaving behind them such marks of spoliation as many persons above them in station have left in almost every city in Europe; in short, the working classes have avoided that which is a disgrace to the English character, and which leads every English traveller of cultivated taste and refined feelings to blush for his countrymen. We shall always advocate the free admission of the public to these institutions, because we believe that the Fine Arts have ever exercised a benign influence over the thoughts and actions of mankind; they remove man for a time from the chilling effects of the selfishness and the hard-heartedness which surround him in life; they abstract his thoughts from the mere materiality of his existence; they leave his imagination free to rove in the bright world of ideality; they purify his thoughts, they turn his actions into the kindest channels, and they lead him to cherish the loftiest aspirations of his nature.

THE SMOKE NUISANCE.—The committee of the House of Commons, of which Mr. Mackinnon is chairman, sat for the first time on Tuesday week. During the course of last week Dr. Reid, Dr. Ure, Mr. West, of Leeds; Mr. C. W. Williams, of Liverpool; and many other scientific men, engineers, manufacturers, and others, were examined. The general opinion expressed by the witnesses was, that the smoke given off by the chimneys of the furnaces in the metropolis was a great evil, and that there were abundant means for its almost, if not total, suppression. Mr. West stated, that at Leeds, where active measures had been adopted by the corporation, there was a great deal less given off in the atmosphere; and Mr. Smith, a commissioner of police from Bradford, stated, that from the exertions of the commissioners, aided by a local act, out of 138 mills in the jurisdiction of the town, there were but four in which smoke-consuming apparatus of some kind had not been introduced. The effect of this was that the smoke had been lessened one-fourth, whilst in the course of a short time there would be no difference in the atmosphere on a week day to that of a Sunday. The evidence was also very conclusive as regards the influence of smoke upon the personal appearance, social habits, and moral condition of the poor. The sittings of the committee will probably extend another fortnight, and one part of its object is the examination of the various patented and other plans that have been brought forward for its suppression. Its members are composed chiefly of the representatives of towns and districts who complain most of the evils. [We shall notice the report when printed.]